

THE ANTIQUITY OF THE
RED RACE IN AMERICA

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.
UNITED STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM.

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THOMAS WILSON,

Curator, Department of Prehistoric Anthropology, U. S. National Museum.

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The only discussion in this paper is as to the antiquity of the Indian or red race, and this applies only to the aborigines found here by Columbus at the time of his discovery. No question is involved of another or earlier race, by whatever name called, whether mound-builder or paleolithic.

The ancestry of the American race has been variously attributed to Semite, Phœnician, and Mongolian races, and, possibly, to a mixture of some or all, with many additions. The best of these theories have been based only on alleged similarities in characteristics of the Indians and their alleged ancestors.

The argument can be placed on a broader basis; evidence can be adduced bearing on more extended propositions and can be applied to a larger group of these peoples.

The preliminary proposition is that the American race of Indians is practically the same throughout the entire hemisphere. With all their diversity of anatomy and physiology (which diversity, by the way, is not greater among Indians than it is among various members of the white or black races), they are of the same type, and form but a single race. Doctor Brinton gave this as his opinion in his address before the Section of Anthropology of the American Association for the Advancement of Science at its New York meeting. It is the basis of his book on "The American Race." Darwin remarks the close family resemblance between distant tribes in America. Doctor Coleman asserts the essential physical identity of the American Indian. Starting, then, with this assumption of the identity of race, it is to be argued that it began in America in one of two ways—either by evolution from the lower animals or by migration as man from other countries.

In whichever of these ways the red man appeared in America, we are entitled to suppose, and may fairly argue, that in the beginning the race was here represented by but few individuals. There may have been but a single pair, or there may have been a hundred pairs, of individuals. Either number will suit the argument. Accepting, then, as a fact, the beginning of the red man in America with a small

number of individuals, it follows that they occupied a restricted locality. This particular locality may have been on the east coast or on the west coast, may have been north or south. The North American Indian has been on this hemisphere such a length of time that, branching out from this little colony in a single locality by ordinary procreation, he has so increased in numbers that at the time of the discovery by Columbus, it is estimated that there were from five to eleven millions.

From the single locality which the small colony originally inhabited, it had also extended itself territorially, and had populated pretty equally the hemisphere from the Arctic Circle on the north to Terra del Fuego on the south, and from the Atlantic Ocean on the east to the Pacific Ocean on the west.

The first point is, that this increase in number, and this extension in territory, required a long period of time, and are proofs of the antiquity of the race.

The confusion of tongues and increase in the number of languages among the Indians is another evidence of their antiquity. When the first colony of Indians appeared, whether by evolution or migration, they could have spoken practically but one language. Suppose, in case of migration, that they spoke many languages prior to their coming together on these, to them, foreign shores, after their arrival they would inevitably speak but one language. They would invent a common language if none existed. This would not be difficult for a colony small in numbers. With this for a starting point, we may see what they have done. They spread themselves up and down the valleys, across the rivers, and over the mountains. While at first they may have retained their communication with the parent colony and kept up their original language, it continued only while those relations were maintained. When the offspring got so far distant that they did not visit the parent colony and had no relation with its members, they invented their own languages, different from those of their ancestors, and this continued until they became a parent colony, sending forth younger colonies, which, in their turn, cut off their relations and invented new languages. So they went from east to west, north to south. This continued for such a great length of time that, not only had they come at the time of the discovery to occupy the entire hemisphere, but had also established (according to the investigations of the Bureau of Ethnology) not less than two hundred separate languages, fifty-two of which belonged to North America alone, with dialects and variations innumerable. If we accept these facts (and it appears as though we must), the corollary of the immensity of the time is inevitable.

The different cultures among the aborigines or Indians of the Western Hemisphere in different localities or portions of the country point to the same general conclusion. Over all Canada and the United States, except the extreme southwest, the culture, or rather the sav-

agery, of the nomadic Indians prevailed, which was indicated by their principal occupations—war, hunting, and fishing.

Yet there are broad lines of demarcation in their culture, the principal and best defined of which was the building of mounds and earthworks. These monuments, of such great magnitude and extent in certain localities in the interior of the United States, did not extend over half its territory. The mounds and earthworks were confined between the twenty-fifth and the fifty-first northern parallels of latitude, and between the sixty-ninth and one hundred and first meridians of longitude. The mound-building area had its greatest length from Cape Sable, Florida, to Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba, and its greatest breadth from Point Pemaquid, Maine, to Bismarck, North Dakota. No mounds or earthworks are found outside this area.

The culture of the aborigines occupying Mexico and Central America, with the pueblo regions of Arizona and New Mexico, was of a totally different character from that in the other regions of North America. They were sedentary, agricultural, religious, and highly ceremonial; they built immense monuments of the most enduring character, the outside of the stone walls of some of which were decorated in a high order of art, resembling more the great Certosa of Pavia than any other monument in Europe. The Teocalli, or mounds of ceremony or sacrifice, were immense. The manufacture and use of stone images and idols were extensive and surprising to the last degree. Their working of jade and the extensive use thereof surpasses that of any other locality in prehistoric times. Their pottery excites our wonder and admiration; some specimens for their beauty, their elegance of form, and their fineness of decoration; other specimens, of idols or images, are astonishing on account of the precision of their manufacture and of the difficulty of its accomplishment by hand.

The culture of Central America, Nicaragua, Yucatan, Costa Rica, was as different from that of Mexico as the Mexican was from that of the red Indian of the north. The gold ornaments of Chiriqui and Quimbaya are evidence, not simply of a different material, but of a different art in working that material. The pottery of Mexico, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica displays such marked differences of kind, form, color, decoration, size, and mode of manufacture as to show as much difference between the cultures of these countries with a separation between them as clearly marked and isolation each from the other as between any three countries in modern times. The pottery milk pans made in western Ohio and used there by our mothers were not more different from the porcelain of Sevres or Meissen or the ware of Delft than was the aboriginal pottery of America in different localities.

The culture of Colombia and Peru in South America tells the same story of separation and long-continued isolation, and it finds its continuation among the aborigines of the Orinoco, Amazon, La Plata, and so on south to Patagonia. The isolation of the Patagonians has been

continued for such a length of time as that, they have not only maintained a state of brutal savagery peculiar to themselves, but they have made a distinct physical or somatological change, amounting not simply to a different tribe, but almost to a different race, in that they are the tallest people in the hemisphere, and, possibly, in the world.

Yet with all these differences, physical, technological, and sociological, the aborigines of the hemisphere have retained their original characteristics so as to stamp them all of one race—blood relations—all belonging to the same stock and derived from the same ancestry. With all these differences, the principal implements and objects employed by the various tribes or peoples in all or any of the countries in the hemisphere, whether in North or South America, were practically the same, thus continuing the evidence of their relationship and early communication. The hammerstones, polished stone hatchets, the scrapers, spindle whorls, and the great mass of aboriginal implements of stone made by chipping or flaking, comprising arrow and spear heads, knives, daggers, and poniards, are all so much alike as to show their relationship and, consequently, the relationship of the tribes or peoples who made them. This being accepted, these immense differences are accounted for only by the separation and isolation of certain of the tribes of the red men, and this is evidence of their great antiquity and long-continued occupation of the country.

Again, the fixedness of type and the persistence of animal characteristics among the red Indians are further evidence. It is an accepted anthropological and ethnological fact that the older a race is the more deeply seated and permanently fixed become the traits of character in its people. This carries with it the correlative proposition that the more permanent the characteristics of a race, the better the evidence of its antiquity. Applying this rule to the American Indians, we find that, with all the diversity claimed, their characteristics are persistent, even more than those of the white, the yellow, or the black races, and that this includes the physical as well as the mental, moral, and sociological traits. That the wild Indian is harder to tame than any other human animal can only be accounted for on one of two theories—either he has greater natural and original individuality, independence, and self-reliance, a higher desire for liberty, and a determination to overcome all obstacles in the way of maintaining that liberty, or else it is the result of persistence through many generations in the condition of savagery. Possibly it may be a combination of the two, and the latter has produced the former. But in any event the fact remains that the American Indian has greater fixity of type and of characteristics than have other races, and this indicates, if it does not prove, the long-continued and persistent exercise of the conditions which produced these characteristics and, consequently, his high antiquity.

The discovery of America found the natives in that stage of culture known in Europe as the neolithic period, or polished stone age. His cutting implements were of stone and not of metal, and by whatever method he shaped or made them, the finishing was by grinding or polishing. The similarities of the Indian's culture with that of other countries show that, if he migrated from any of these countries bringing this culture with him, he did so at a period when they were in the neolithic stage. This stage, and the one subsequent to it, was, in the Eastern hemisphere, entirely in prehistoric times, and came to an end at an early period. It belonged to the first and second, possibly the third, cities of Troy, on the plain of Hissarlik, and came to an end before the beginning of culture in Greece. When Homer wrote, it had passed, not only behind the beginnings of Rome, but behind her predecessors in Italy, the Etruscans. The introduction of bronze into France and England, probably 2,000 years B. C., sounded the death knell of the neolithic period and was the beginning of its end in those countries. In Asia the historical evidence shows even an earlier cessation of the neolithic period. The period of the Chinese civilization carries us back much farther, and shows the people of that country to have passed beyond the neolithic or polished stone age much earlier. Now the occupiers of American soil were emigrants from some, or, possibly, all of the countries mentioned, but, whichever it may have been, the emigration must have taken place during the neolithic age, and not after its close. Western Europe was the latest country in which the neolithic period came to a close and was succeeded by the age of bronze. So the commencement of the age of bronze in Europe affords a supposititious mark in the history of our country as the latest date at which the neolithic migration to America could have taken place. How much earlier it might have been, is a matter of speculation.

These arguments, based upon facts which appear indisputable, go to show that the migration by which the American race came to occupy the Western Hemisphere could not have been less than two thousand years prior to the Christian era, but that, if they came from other countries, they might have come a long time before.